

## INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY.

### CHAPTER 8.

Whilst the desire for life must be paramount, if the human race is to continue; it is not enough. The simple desire to survive, and to be happy, is surely too timid a desire? To thrive there must be the desire to dominate life. Now that we can view creation as a whole, now that we understand that the consciousness of human beings can influence, to some extent, the future of evolution, we must desire to steer that evolution in the way life would have us go. If human beings find they have a certain power to do good, it is no good their attempting to renounce that power. They must be willing to use it; although some will use it to do evil. And so with the desire to influence the direction of evolution, we are back with the “final causes” of Aristotle and the medieval schoolmen. A final cause was the purpose for which something was created. We are all adventurous when young; and implementing the purposes of evolution should be the supreme adventure.

Expressing it differently, life only takes wing when one finds one loves someone, and knows that she loves you. So is one sorry for suicide bombers, because they are outside the mainstream of evolution, which is this zest for life? Hardly, because it is so obvious that the three mono-theistic religions should try to compose their differences, and be reconciled if at all possible. And suicide bombers dramatically obstruct any reconciliation. Maybe Teilhard de Chardin was right that only Christianity will ultimately be able to accommodate itself to modern knowledge; or maybe all three religions will be able to accommodate themselves to it. What matters is to avoid the desire for death, which is the antithesis of life. Sometimes death is to be preferred to dishonour. Sometimes death is to be welcomed as a friend; but this is exceptional, and usually only at the end of a long and useful life. Generally our view must be the one in Deuteronomy, to which all three religions subscribe; namely, that God has placed before us life and good, death and evil; therefore we must choose life! It is utter folly to seek to destroy your enemies utterly. You will never succeed, because you will turn many of your former friends into enemies. So your enemies will multiply far faster than you destroy them; a lesson which mercifully the Christian West had learned by the end of the Second World War, with the result that a massive effort was made to rehabilitate Western Europe. But if you are attacked you have to defend yourself; and if that means ruthlessly killing your attackers, nobody can say they did not ask for it. Though possibly out of date, the theory of counter-insurgency used to be that if you killed the leaders, the rank and file would melt back into the crowd, reflecting perhaps that there was much to be said for a quiet life.

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But the suicide bomber does raise in a dramatic form the question of what is likely to happen to us in the next world, if indeed there is a next world. Not that I am bothered about the fate of the bombers themselves, although all my instinct is that they will be in difficulties. Rather, what is going to happen to those people in this country, who seem to think survival at any price is the only good? It is not much good going to the Church for an answer, because not many people have much confidence that it knows the answers. Christianity has been declining ever since the start of the enlightenment; that is to say from about the 1720s. Gibbon regarded Christianity as one of the principal factors in the decline and fall of Rome; and I suspect he regarded it as a subversive influence in any community. He despised religion. And you only have to read Jane Austin to discover that country parsons were regarded in her day as nonentities. The further decline of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is exemplified by the sad life of John Henry Newman, who first championed the Oxford Movement, and then after his conversion to Rome did his best to destroy it.

But the decline was rapidly accelerated with the Church's refusal to come to terms with science. First the debate between Bishop Wilberforce and Thomas Henry Huxley about Darwin's massive discoveries in regard to fossils and the age of the earth. Then at the turn of the century by Einstein's theory of relativity, with its hypothesis that in the world of space and time no one frame of reference is better, or worse, than any other; which must call in question the idea that religious knowledge is different from any other kind of knowledge. In their folly, the leaders of the Church failed to insist that their supreme truth was that God had created the universe, and it didn't matter much how he had done it; instead they insisted they had a superior kind of knowledge, which simply was not true.

Finally in the late 1940s Jung, who was a great admirer of England, invited English theologians to enter into a dialogue with him about his findings in the world of the mind and the unconscious. They declined; even Arch-bishop Temple I understand failed so much as to answer his letter. Such rudeness is only equalled by the taunt attributed to Sam Wilberforce, at the debate in Oxford, "And is it on your mother's side or your father's side, Mr.Huxley, that you are descended from a monkey?" Huxley is said to have muttered under his breath, "God has delivered him into my hands"; and replied, "If I had to choose between being descended from a monkey, or from a man who perverts the truth, I would be hard pressed to know which choice to make". But at least the debate between science and religion did not lead to violence, as it had done in the Arius-Athanasius debate both before and after Nicea.

So if the official answers are unlikely to command much confidence, we have little option but to revert to the most likely speculations. Some people doubt that there is a next

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world; but if that is right, there is simply no point in ever sacrificing oneself for others. And to lay down one's life, as so many soldiers have to do in War, that is sheer madness. Honour, duty, nobility of character are all contemptuously discarded! I have little time for those who discard the better human virtues; they depend on the rest of us, who try to do our duty most of the time. It may not be a philosophical answer, to say that the practice of the basic human virtues is necessary for society to continue; but it is a very good guide to practical conduct. And if my Theory of Consciousness is correct in saying that the validity of the philosophical answers depends on the validity of the assumptions underlying the philosophical frame of mind; it means that if the assumptions are rubbish, the philosophical answers are rubbish too! So what seems a sensible choice in practice, is likely to be a sensible choice to make.

And the moment one admits that there probably is a next world, then by far the most likely speculation is that one's conduct in this world is likely to influence one's fate in the next. To take the argument a stage further; if there is telepathy in this world, and I am sure there is, for though I have never sought it I have had experience of it, then there is nothing to prevent communication with the spirits of the dead. Indeed all Christians will at one time or another pray to Jesus; and few religious facts are more certain than that he died, even if he rose again. Praying to him is attempting to have communication with the dead, in the sense of his being on the other side of death from us.

And finding inspiration in the conduct of others who have died is in a manner of speaking to have some communication with them, at least in one's imagination. If they are alive in the next world, then finding inspiration in them is similar to praying to Jesus. If they are in limbo, and not really alive at the present moment, the position is different; and none of us has any reliable idea what that position is. But such inspiration presupposes that the conduct, which one seeks to emulate, was rewarded, and not punished. And we do all seek to emulate figures in the past, or people whom we have known who have died. So what general speculation about the next world is likely to be nearest the mark?

Surely the most likely speculation is that what a man has sought diligently in this world, he will obtain in full measure in the next? After all, Socrates and Jesus were both agreed that one's fate in the next world would depend on one's choices in this! If one has sought self-advancement in disregard of everyone and everything, then in the next world where there are no things and probably no advancement, one is likely to be left with oneself, for an eternity. No friends, no loyalty, no deference. What an appalling prospect; to have only one's own company! If one has looked forward to sexual fulfilment, then one will probably get it in the most appalling degradation imaginable. If one has actively sought evil, then the

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scenes depicted in Michelangelo's Last Judgement will be but a pale imitation of the real thing. To be tormented by the devils of fear, guilt, remorse, and be unable to repent because it is too late; fire and brimstone would be better than that, because they would at least come to an end. Fear and guilt never come to an end. Or again, if during this life one has never bothered much about eternity, then one is likely to be overwhelmed by the eternal sleep of death; oblivion. Goethe looked forward to the time when Mephistopheles or the Spirit of the World would be saved; but I think he was too sanguine. He believed in the essential goodness of man; and I regret to say my experience is different.

If one readmits God into one's thinking, the picture remains much the same, although there is a greater prospect of mercy. Even if Jesus was not the only son of God, he was still by far the greatest religious genius who ever lived. And what he went through was more than most of us would care to face; and for whom did he do it? For his enemies, believe it or not. Even if you discount the idea that he came from Heaven, and knew at least something about the place he had come from, his views on the after-life command more respect than most peoples'. So one may be confident the Deity, albeit just, is not vindictive. True scripture says, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord"; but it is seldom that retribution follows swiftly on evil deeds in this world. Jesus prophesied the fall and devastation of Jerusalem if his gospel of peace were rejected; and in doing so was remarkably prescient. But it did not occur until a generation later. Nor was there any obligation on the Jewish leaders to listen to the zealots, and rebel in 66AD, but they did. And to start with they had some success; but in 70AD the Romans made a thorough job of it, as they usually did. And the result was the Jewish nation lost its country for nearly 1900 years; a big price to pay for a foolish political mistake. But then in my experience, if you make one foolish decision, you usually go on to make others; it becomes a habit, because you lose your sense of perspective. That is the only way, I think, in which God seeks vengeance; by allowing men to blind themselves by the folly of their own conduct. But what a frightful world it would be, if it were not so; if evil men could do evil with impunity, and not even suffer the inconvenience of spiritual blindness as a result of what they do. Evil would triumph! It is actually a mercy that we make ourselves blind by our folly or evil deeds. It is a merciful vengeance.

At the same time, the Divine mercy is unlikely to permit a second bite at the cherry. What would be the point? Any advocate knows that a re-trial is largely a ritual affair. All the witnesses are prepared for the clever questions; and only exceptionally is a more just result obtained in a retrial. What would be the point from the Deity's point of view? Any repentance after death would stem from expediency; and the loyalty of such penitents would

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be that of fair-weather friends. Who wants that? Mercy would be extended to those who had tried, but got it wrong. But what would be the point in extending it to those who had not tried? If there is a God, the whole point of this world surely is whether you are prepared to side with God, or right, or duty, when it is far from obvious that evil will not win the day?

But if I am right, that this world is fundamentally about immortality, why is it that most people reject immortality, when presented with the opportunity of accepting it? In youth one is thrilled with the prospect of exploring the future. And if the spirit of God does indeed dwell in the depths of the psyche, then the genius of Christianity is that it holds out the prospect of a limitless development of the human spirit, which extends far beyond youth. One might have thought the prospect was infinitely inviting. With the world of relationships blossoming into the world of inter-penetrating minds; and no doubt beyond this a world where events cast a shadow in front of them, so that one has a premonition that something of the sort will happen. One might think the adventure could go on indefinitely. Some events do cast a shadow in front of them. The supreme example of this was surely the Transfiguration, when Jesus led his disciples up into the mountain to have an amazing spiritual experience. He did this, we are told, six days after he had asked them whom they thought he was; and the Gospels say nothing in vain. The inference is obvious: that Jesus knew roughly what to expect, whether or not he expected what is said actually to have happened.

Such experiences can happen to us too. When you have a premonition that disaster is approaching, and will be upon you unless you take avoiding action, it is not solely in the imagination, as some scoffers might suggest. When only one person has the premonition, then however vivid the experience, it is difficult to refute the suggestion that one remembers those occasions when disaster struck, and forgets those when nothing happened. But when more than one person has the premonition, then it is either telepathy or premonition.

So why is youth so reluctant to set out on such an adventure into the world of the spirit? I think it is because you have to break free of convention; and most young people are quite incapable of doing so for more than a limited time; and of those who can most are incapable of living a normal life thereafter. They tend either to become cranks, or dropouts. It requires considerable self-confidence to break free of convention, yet be willing to subscribe to it as long as is expedient. And when a man has the maturity to have this self-confidence, generally he has lost the thirst for adventure!

But the trouble is that without adventure, the whole community becomes ossified in the world of Health and Safety. Of course the provisions of the Factory Acts and the Building Regulations, with which I used to be fairly familiar, are a great benefit to the community.

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Their purpose is to safeguard the lives and limbs of workmen from the dangers that employers are willing to disregard, either from lack of imagination, habit, or ruthless greed. But as with everything, Health and Safety can be taken too far; and when it is, it induces into the community an atmosphere of stultifying cowardice. Be this as it may, a far worse disability descends on a community when it can no longer distinguish between right and wrong. In our society in Britain today, where money has been made the measure of all things, “right” is what makes you richer and happier, “wrong” is what makes you poorer. And in this society you hear of incidents in which the Police, whom I much respect, seem incapable of distinguishing a victim from an aggressor, or right from wrong. You hear of law-abiding people being arrested for conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace, at the very time when those preaching mayhem are left untouched. Does this not lead in time to the Nazi practice, when they sought to consolidate their power, of making the law-abiding bourgeois into the villains of society, and the ruthless law-breakers its saviours? There are certain parallels between our society and the German Weimar Republic of the 1920s, when they were sleep-walking towards disaster. And only a few people have the courage to protest.

The truth, disagreeable to many people, is that only the religions insist on the difference between right and wrong, and provide a motive for holding fast to one’s opinions. Different religions will say that different things are right and wrong; but they do at least have firm standards, whereas your secular State depends entirely on convention for its standards. Anyone who doubts this need only go to a Judge’s sentencing conference to discover that sentences for criminal behaviour are entirely legal convention.

There was of course a fierce debate, after the publication of Newton’s Principia, as to whether it led to a belief in a mechanical universe. Newton’s view was that it did not make much difference; but in the long term his work destroyed belief in a god-created universe. Particularly in France, it led the way towards the secular society of the enlightenment. The tragedy is that, when science showed that much of the detail of the medieval view was false, nobody declared that even out of a mechanical world of science, man’s freewill and the spirit to exercise it can blossom and flower, and above man’s domination of Nature the Divine Creation can still tower majestically beautiful. They forgot that the end-product may be much more wonderful and complex than the initial detail.